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**FY 2020**  
**SMALL NEPA PROJECT DESCRIPTION**  
**Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests**

Please **do not leave any field BLANK**.

Submit form electronically (as Word doc) to james.chynoweth@usda.gov by November 6, 2020.

*(NOTE: Italicized / red comments are for reference only. You can delete them after completing the form.)*

<b>Project Name</b>	Nork Fork Aspen 3
<b>District Name (or "Forestwide")</b>	North Fork
<b>County (-ies) where project located?</b>	Clearwater
<b>FS Personnel Name, Phone Number and Email</b> <i>If a partnership, please add name, phone and email; however, <b>an FS employee MUST BE the project proponent</b> and point of contact.</i>	Mike Pruss (208) 935-4256, <a href="mailto:michael.pruss@usda.gov">michael.pruss@usda.gov</a> Craig Roach (208) 476-8298, <a href="mailto:craig.roach2@usda.gov">craig.roach2@usda.gov</a> Brandi Felts, Idaho Department of Fish and Game (208) 750-5010, <a href="mailto:brandi.felts@idfg.idaho.gov">brandi.felts@idfg.idaho.gov</a>
<b>Legal Location</b> <i>Township(s), Range(s), and Section(s) of project.</i>	T39N R10E S19 (Junction Cr Aspen Clones) T41N R11E S30 (Birch Hill Aspen Clone) T42N R11E S25-26 (Long Creek Aspen Clone)
<b>Decision Maker's Name</b> <i>District Ranger/Line Officer responsible for signing the decision document</i>	Andrew Skowlund, NF District Ranger
<b>Is the project associated with meeting a Forest target?</b>	Yes: Fuels, Terrestrial Habitat, Vegetation
<b>Which CE Category does this project fit?</b> <i>Provide citation: 36 CFR 220.6(e)(x)</i> <i>Categorical Exclusion categories can be found here:</i> <a href="#"><i>FSH1909.15_30 Amend-2018-1 CEs</i></a> <i>See ** below regarding 220.6(d)(x) projects.</i>	36 CFR 220.6(e)(6)

**\*\* A Project Record and written Decision are not required for projects using a 36 CFR 220.6 (d) category, except at the Decision Maker's discretion.**

*IF being submitted under 36 CFR 220.6 (d) category, does the Decision Maker want a written Decision?*

Yes      No

NA

*If no, this form **does not** need to be filled out nor submitted to the Small NEPA planner.*

*If yes, provide the category in the block above, complete the remainder of this form and have Decision Maker submit it to the Small NEPA planner. Don't forget that the Proponent must submit shapefiles as well.*

**Provide names and mailing addresses and/or email addresses of the individuals, groups, agencies, etc. to be included (**other than those listed below\***) for Scoping.**

- DO NOT leave this box blank: **If no additional individuals are to be externally scoped please enter NA.**

Zach Swearingen, IDFG, [zachary.swearingen@idfg.idaho.gov](mailto:zachary.swearingen@idfg.idaho.gov)

*\* The following have requested to receive scoping information via hard copy (postal mailings) for all projects: Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee, Stan Burt, James Colantino, Mike Cook, Friends of the Clearwater, and Penny Keck.*

**Does the Decision Maker want a Legal Notice published in the Lewiston Tribune\*? Yes \_\_\_\_ No X**

*If yes, the scoping period will start the day after the Legal Notice is published.*

*If no, the scoping period will start ~4 days after the date the scoping letters are sent via postal mailing.*

**\* A legal notice is not required for CE projects.**

**The scoping period will be 14 days unless the Decision Maker wants to change it. NA Days**

**What Level of Analysis (below) does the Decision Maker want for the Project?**

  X   **Low level:** Choose this level if the project's level of public scrutiny is expected to be relatively low or unknown. Documentation for low level analysis projects would be a completed Extraordinary Circumstances checklist filled out by the specialists, including the name of the specialist who performed the analysis, the project name, and date it was completed. No other written documentation would be generated.

       **Moderate level:** Choose this level if the project's level of public scrutiny is expected to be relatively moderate to high. In this case, specialists would complete the Extraordinary Circumstances checklist with the only write up being for resources that are present and the rationale for the effects call. No write up would be given for items in the checklist that are not present.

If the determination is no effect (which most CE's should have zero to very little adverse effects), then document *why* that determination was made in one paragraph or less. If the determination is an adverse effect, then *why* that determination was made would be written in less than three paragraphs.

**List the Management Area(s) in which your project is located.**

Birch Hill: C8S

Junction Mountain: C1

Long Cr: C8S, US

See Table 1. (page 9)

**What are the Management Area(s)' Goals and Standards\* *relevant to your project?***

C1 – Key big game summer range: Maintain optimum big game (mostly elk) habitat conditions through vegetative manipulation where needed but without road construction. Provide livestock grazing where compatible with elk use and high quality dispersed recreation.

C8S – Big game summer range: Manage big game (primarily elk) summer range for a minimum of 75 percent of elk habitat potential through modified timber management. Maintain or enhance moose habitat as indicated by project or area analysis. Rehabilitate big game habitat for thermal cover, security, and forage as needed to provide optimum habitat conditions.

US – Unsuitable for timber management: Manage for resources other than timber such as dispersed recreation, and big-game summer range as appropriate.

The desired conditions within the treatment areas include: Mixed age aspen overstory, capable of supporting now and/or in the future, aspen-dependent sensitive wildlife species such as flammulated owls and pygmy nuthatches. Reduced ladder fuels composed of encroaching mid-seral conifer species, increasing resiliency of aspen clones to future wildfires, and capable of supporting future prescribed fires. Reduced mature shrub component, with re-sprouting young shrubs and a seed bed capable of supporting shrub, forb and grass seedlings, increasing plant species diversity and forage availability for big game species.

*\* Described in Chapter 3 of the Nez Perce and Clearwater Forest Plans.*

*\* Include any relevant Forestwide Standards found in Chapter 2 of the Forest Plans as well.*

**Is the project in a designated Idaho Roadless Area (IRA)?** ☒ Yes\* ☐ No

If yes, which one? Bighorn – Weitas, Meadow Creek – Upper North Fork, Rawhide (see Table 1, pg. 10)

*\* Fill in the 'Project in Roadless Area' table below, AND complete a Briefing Paper. Provide the completed Briefing Paper to the Environmental Coordinator (Zoanne Anderson) and Brian Riggers PRIOR TO SCOPING.*

Is the project in a congressionally designated area, ex Wilderness Area, Wild & Scenic River Corridor, Research Natural Area, Historic Trail, etc.? Yes\* ☒ No

If yes, which one(s)?

\* For projects that occur in a **Wilderness Area**, contact Carol Hennessey, carol.hennessey@usda.gov, 935-4270, BEFORE submitting this proposal, to discuss how the project may affect the designated area.

\* For projects that occur in a **Wild and Scenic River Corridor**, contact Chris Noyes, chris.noyes@usda.gov, 935-4289, BEFORE submitting this proposal, to discuss how the project may affect the designated area.

\* For projects that occur in a **Research Natural Area**, contact Mike Hays, mike.hays@usda.gov, 935-4285, BEFORE submitting this proposal, to discuss how the project may affect the designated area.

\* For projects that occur in the **Lolo Trail National Historic Landmark**, contact Steve Lucas, steve.lucas@usda.gov, 963-4212, BEFORE submitting this proposal, to discuss how the project may affect the designated area.

Are there Floodplains or Wetlands in the project area? Yes ☒ No

Are there Municipal Watersheds in the project area? Yes ☒ No

If yes, which one? NA

Is the project located in an RHCA? ☒ Yes ☐ No

**Describe the Existing Conditions of the project area.**

Mature aspen clones without periodic disturbance become encroached by the dominant surrounding conifer habitat types, until the clone is a fraction of its peak size. Mature clones serve as important seed sources for new aspen clone development, but provide lower value wildlife habitat than young clones. Aspen is generally in decline in the western U.S. and without active management is likely to continue to decline, including on the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest. Most aspen clones on the Forest are of small size (1-15 acres) due to a number of factors, but this small size provides the opportunity to efficiently double or triple their size by removing in-clone and adjacent competing vegetation at the same time that the mature clone is being cut to reset the seral clock.

**What is the Purpose and Need for the proposed action\*?**

A unique terrestrial wildlife assemblage is dependent upon aspen habitat, including Region 1 Sensitive Species such as flammulated owls and pygmy nuthatches. Aspen clones are uncommon on the Forest. Because the project area is along the North Fork of the Clearwater River, it experiences high summer recreational use, and is therefore susceptible to human-caused wildfires. This project will reduce ladder fuels in aspen-dominated clones, increasing their resiliency to wildfire, and allowing the clones to be maintained using periodic prescribed fire over the long term.

Aspen clones represent a rare habitat on the Forest; regenerating and expanding them will maintain an important component to overall habitat diversity. Regenerating clones are important foraging areas for elk, deer, and moose as well as foraging and fledgling dispersal areas for neo-tropical migratory songbirds. The aspen and associated fruiting shrubs in the regenerating clones will provide important summer, fall and winter forage for ruffed grouse.

This project is within the Lolo Elk Management Zone, an area that historically provided habitat for one of the largest elk herds in North America. Elk habitat and elk populations have declined dramatically in the Lolo Zone in the past decade, partially due to declining habitat quality. Early seral habitats maintained and created by the actions of this proposal will provide needed summer forage areas for elk, moose and deer. Elimination encroaching conifers and re-setting the growth on the mature brush and adjacent aspen clones is needed to provide improved forage quantity and quality for big game, especially in critical summer foraging habitats.

*\* The purpose and need describes:*

- *What is the desired condition or outcome (the **purpose**) of the action?*
- *Why is the action being proposed at this location at this time (the problem/the **need** for the action)?*

**Describe the Proposed Action.**

What is provided will be used by the resource specialists for their effects analyses, and in the Decision document. Please provide detailed descriptions – **in narrative paragraph form** – of the following:

The proposal would be accomplished by contracted labor (under Idaho Fish and Game's Good Neighbor Authority agreement) and/or Forest Service personnel.

The project would consist of treating 4 aspen clones in the North Fork Ranger District (see Table 1, pg. 10 and maps). The clone proposed for treatment on Birch Hill would be accessible by traveling approximately 4 miles up the Fly Hill Road, FS Rd 720. This clone is immediately northwest of Birch Hill and spans both sides of the road where it occurs. The clones on Junction Mountain would be accessible by the hiking approximately 2.5 miles up Junction Mountain Trail, Trail # 191. The trailhead is accessed by crossing the pack bridge approximately 1.2 miles upstream (Kelly Creek) from the Kelly Forks Work Center. The Long Creek aspen clone would be accessible by FS Road 250, approximately 2.5 miles south of Hoodoo Pass on the Idaho – Montana State Line. The clone is located to the west of Long Creek. The proposed project would not change access restrictions.

Mature aspen and competing conifers and over-mature shrubs would be cut or girdled within the treatment unit, and competing conifers and mature shrubs will be cut or girdled adjacent to the clone in areas where suppressed aspen regeneration, or evidence of recent aspen is present. Conifers within 200 feet of the clone would be cut to expand the extent of the clone. Two to five mature aspen per clone would be retained to buffer against the possibility of drought induced Sudden Aspen Decline. If present, aspen with cavities capable of supporting sensitive wildlife species, such as flammulated owls and pygmy nuthatches, would be retained.

Ideal cutting timing would be during aspen dormant period when ground is frozen or at least dry, however other times would be considered based on resource availability. Cutting would be completed by hand using a tree girdler and chainsaws. Cutting would be expected to be completed in a single field season (September-November). Units may be re-treated, as necessary, to achieve objectives.

Project areas would be monitored one year post treatment to evaluate immediate effect of treatments. Project areas would be re-evaluated 4-5 years post treatment to ensure that aspen regeneration is not suffering from Sudden Aspen Decline and document elk utilization, and to determine if various elements of the habitat treatments should be replicated elsewhere on the forest in future phases. Elements to be evaluated via ocular estimates include % regeneration of cut portions of the clones, % survival of the residual mature aspen trees, regeneration response of suppressed aspen in clone's halo area (200' perimeter from outside edge of clone).

Flammulated owl monitoring would be conducted on a 5-year basis to monitor use of the area long-term at the nearest accessible night survey route following standard protocols.

**List the Design Feature / Mitigation Measures \* to be included with the Proposed Action.**

No Design Features or Mitigation Measures are anticipated; however, if resource protection needs are identified during resource review, they will be added and followed.

*\* The Design Features and Mitigation Measures documents (pick lists) can be found here:*

- [Box\1900Planning\1950EnviroPolicyProcedures\Mitigation measures\DesignFeatures\\_March2020.docx](#)
- [Box\1900Planning\1950EnviroPolicyProcedures\Mitigation measures\MitigationMeasures\\_March2020.docx](#)

*\* Additional Design Features/Measures can be listed under “Additional Information” on the last page of this form.*

**Small NEPA IDT/resource specialists are listed below. Contact them if you have any questions regarding their resource for your project.**

Botany – Mike Hays, [mike.hays@usda.gov](mailto:mike.hays@usda.gov); 983-4028

Fisheries – Derrick Bawdon, [derrick.bawdon@usda.gov](mailto:derrick.bawdon@usda.gov); 963-4211

Heritage – Christy Mog, [christy.mog@usda.gov](mailto:christy.mog@usda.gov); 935-4269

Hydrology – TBD

Minerals – Marty Jones, [martin.jones@usda.gov](mailto:martin.jones@usda.gov); 983-5158

Recreation – Carol Hennessey, [carol.hennessey@usda.gov](mailto:carol.hennessey@usda.gov); 935-4270

Soils – Alex Rozin, [alexandra.rozin@usda.gov](mailto:alexandra.rozin@usda.gov); 842-2100

Wild and Scenic River – Chris Noyes, [chris.noyes@usda.gov](mailto:chris.noyes@usda.gov); 935-4251

Wildlife – Jim Lutes, [james.r.lutes@usda.gov](mailto:james.r.lutes@usda.gov); 963-4202

Small NEPA Planner – Jeff Chynoweth, [james.chynoweth@usda.gov](mailto:james.chynoweth@usda.gov); 935-4260

## **PROJECT MAPS and SHAPEFILES**

Please send – per the instructions outlined below – a GIS-generated map or maps of the project area (pdf format only) with the project submission.

- **Make sure that the map layers can be turned on / off / are editable.**
- **Make sure the map(s) can fit on an 8.5 x 11 sheet of paper.**

1. Provide at least one map, **preferably “portrait” orientation**, with the project area / features as:
  - a Point, e.g. culvert, bridge, etc.,
  - a Line, e.g. fence, road, creek, etc., and/or
  - a Polygon, e.g. stand boundaries, treatment areas, etc.
    - Do not use a point if treating an area, use a polygon.
    - Points/lines/polygons need to be distinct and easily found on the map.
    - The project area / site needs to be centered on the map, especially if only one area/feature.
2. Please **use the Forest Visitor Map as your map’s base layer**.
  - Do not add contour lines to the FV map unless needed for clarifying the proposed action. Contour lines can make the map difficult to read.
    - If contour lines are needed, make sure they are distinguishable from other linear features such as roads, trails, streams, etc.
  - A topo map can be substituted for the FV map. If using a topo map but the contour lines are not important the topo lines should be light gray or opaque.
  - Regardless of base map, make sure there are identifiable elements, e.g. towns, roads, streams, etc. on the map to help locate the project area on the landscape and that the elements are clearly labeled.
3. The **preferred map scale is whatever scale best presents the project area’s location and proposed activities**:
  - If the 1:24K scale is too small (i.e. the project feature(s) – point/line/polygon – would be hard to find or would be indistinguishable on just one map), use a larger scale to show the overall project area (coarse scale map) and smaller scaled maps to show the project features (fine scale map).
  - If the 1:24K scale is too big (i.e. the project feature is a tiny point or thin line lost/hard to find on the larger landscape), use a smaller scale to highlight the feature while ensuring there are elements on the map to identify the project’s location.
  - If you need to make additional maps, please make as few as possible.
4. At a minimum, **all maps should include**:
  - Title (project name and district name only (please));
  - Legend (features clearly labeled)
  - Scale (ending in half miles, e.g. 0\_\_0.25\_\_0.5 miles, or in full miles, e.g. 0\_\_0.25\_\_0.5\_\_1.0 miles)
  - North Arrow
    - Display the above in boxes with a black outline and a white background (not gray or yellow)
    - Do not ‘Halo’ the text or numbers or anything else on the map. Please.
    - The Scale needs to be large enough to read the numbers.
5. Finally, please **include the mapmakers name and the date it was created on the map**.

The Map(s) you provide will be used for Scoping the Public and the Tribes and in the Decision document. Please make sure they show – clearly, effectively, and professionally – what activity or activities are being proposed and where they are located on the Nez Perce - Clearwater National Forests.

## SHAPEFILES

The resource specialists require the shapefile(s) of the project's proposed activities before they will conduct their analyses. Providing the shapefile does not substitute for providing a pdf map.

The Project Proponent needs to send the shapefile, or a location where the shapefile can be found, to the Small NEPA Planner (currently: jjchynoweth@usda.gov) by the time or shortly after the District Ranger submits this form.

- Shapefiles need to include the Project Name and have the Feature (culvert, bridge, etc.) labeled.
- Shapefiles need to include the following extensions – .dbf, .prj, .sbn, .shp, .shx, and .xml.

## Projects in Roadless Area

<b>What is the Inventoried Roadless Area name?</b>  <i>Meadow Creek – Upper North Fork, Bighorn – Weitas, Rawhide</i>	<b><u>Forest Plan IRA Name (if different):</u></b>
<b>Identify the Idaho Roadless Management Classification:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Wild Land Recreation</i></li> <li>• <i>Special Areas of Historic or Tribal Significance</i></li> <li>• <i>Primitive</i></li> <li>• <i>Backcountry Restoration</i></li> <li>• <i>General Forest, Rangeland and Grassland</i></li> </ul>	<b>Classification(s):</b>  Primitive, Backcountry Restoration  <b>(see Table 1, pg. 10)</b>
<b>Does the project involve constructing or reconstructing roads?</b> Yes* <input checked="" type="radio"/> No <i>* If yes, see <a href="http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CFR-2011-title36-vol2">http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CFR-2011-title36-vol2</a> then navigate to Subpart C 294.23</i>	
<b>Does the project involve cutting trees?</b> <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes* <input type="radio"/> No <i>* If yes, see <a href="http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CFR-2011-title36-vol2">http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CFR-2011-title36-vol2</a> then navigate to Subpart C 294.24</i>  Project involves cutting non-commercial trees using slashing/piling treatments to improve habitat for flammulated owls and pygmy nuthatches, both Sensitive Species §294.24(c)(1)(iii) and to maintain and restore the characteristics of ecosystem composition, structure and processes of the Ponderosa Pine stands within the project area §294.24(c)(1)(iv). The treatment will allow for the retention of a diversity of plant and animal communities §294.23(3) and habitat for sensitive species §294.23(4) over the long-term §294.24(c)(2)(i), maximizes the retention of large Ponderosa Pine trees as appropriate for that forest type, promoting fire resilient stands §294.24(c)(2)(ii); and maintains consistency with land management plan components as provided for in §294.28(d).	
<b>Does the project involve removing minerals, including common variety minerals?</b> Yes* <input checked="" type="radio"/> No <i>* If yes, see <a href="http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CFR-2011-title36-vol2">http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CFR-2011-title36-vol2</a> then navigate to Subpart C 294.25</i>	

JC : 8/21/2020

Additional Information:

Table 1. Roadless Aspen Treatments

Area	Clone	Acres	MA*	Roadless Name	Roadless Mgt Classification
Birch Hill	1	20	C8S	Meadow Creek - Upper North Fork	Primitive
Junction Mtn	2	4	C1	Bighorn - Weitas	Backcountry Restoration
Junction Mtn	3	3	C1	Bighorn - Weitas	Backcountry Restoration
Long Creek	4	16	US	Rawhide	Primitive

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\* MA: Management Area